

# The Star-Ledger

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***“Maplewood mom triumphs with new musical ‘Rated P . . . for Parenthood.’”***

NEW JERSEY STAGE REVIEW

## “‘P’ is for Perfect”



Joanna Young in “Rated P . . . for Parenthood” at the South Orange Performing Arts Center.

New musical at SOPAC seems destined for Broadway

By Peter Filichia  
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Here’s a musical revue to bridge the gap between “I Love You! You’re Perfect! Now Change!” and “Menopause.”

The first smash-hit told about the dating game that singles endure before they “settle down.”

The second long-running show gave a look at what women experience when they reach birthdays in their fifties.

For many people, the years in between involve parenthood. So here’s a musical that starts with the birth of a child and continues until the kid is dropped off at college.

It’s a great idea – and writers Sandy Rustin, Dan Lipton and David Rossmer have done it proud. Too bad that “Rated P . . . For Parenthood,” is only playing at the South Orange Performing Arts Center this weekend. But we’ll hear from it again. This, the first production of the new company known as Midtown Direct Rep, deserves to go directly to midtown Manhattan.

Lipton and Rossmer’s music sharply uses hard rock for “Push It All Out,” in which a woman is in agony while giving birth (while her husband’s only discomfort is her squeezing his hand). “Think that was hard?” the other two cast members ask. “Now the real hard part comes.”

Can any parent claim otherwise? Given that all three writers collaborated on lyrics, only they know for certain who’s responsible for this smart comment. Whichever one it is, take a bow.

Of course, in-laws have their own opinions about child-rearing. Here Rustin’s incisiveness in sketch-writing is especially keen, for the first words she has visiting grandparents say is not “Hello,” but “Where’s the baby?” that’s soon followed by a worried, “What’s that on top of his head?” Yet only the rarest of young parents in the audience won’t nod in recognition when one father sings, “Thank God for grandma, because we need the moolah.”

And on through the years we sail. Rustin has a truthful running gag on how much – or how little – parents tell their children about sex.

It may seem like only yesterday that they were asking “Where did I come from?” but now it’s “Did you two do it before you were married?” And speaking of sex, when a growing kid is right there in the next room, there isn’t as much as there used to be, is there?

Plenty of tender moments come between the hilarity. Two fathers who are watching their kids at the playground want to start a conversation and even a friendship, but each is afraid to make the first move. And if anyone doubts that Rustin has a marvelous imagination, witness a sketch between the Tooth Fairy and Santa Claus. They mourn being “out-of-work” because the kid that used to believe in them is now too old to swallow their stories.

What a talented foursome that able director Jeremy Dobrish has recruited. They’re all equally valuable in both song and story, so listing them in alphabetical order is the only fair way to name them: Courtney Balan, Bradley Dean, David Josefsberg and Joanna Young.

The guys shine in a sketch where two gay fathers ruminate on their raising three heterosexual (and randy) teens. Balan shows the frustration of a mother with a Ph.D. in English who can’t help her son do today’s eighth-grade math. When playing the parent of a teenager, Young makes her pronouncement, “You are not going to a beach party on a school night in January” even funnier than it inherently is.

Dobrish brings in the show at a mere 80 minutes, which speeds by – just as a son or daughter’s childhood does.

The brevity helps in another way: Parents of young children won’t have to pay a babysitter any overtime. But the price of a night out will be worth it for all the laughs and terrific tunes.

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# The New York Times

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Spotlight | South Orange

## “The Joys and the Perils of Parenthood, Set to Music”

By TAMMY LA GORCE

SOUTH ORANGE, N.J.

“RATED P,” a new musical being staged May 5 to 8 at the South Orange Performing Arts Center, is about parenthood — “the whole thing, from the time you find out you’re pregnant all the way until the time you send them off to college,” said the writer, Sandy Rustin, of Maplewood.

Ms. Rustin, 35, began writing the sketch comedy three years ago, when the older of her two children was about to enter preschool. Her collaborators Dan Lipton and David Rossmer, both of New York, wrote the lyrics with her and created the music.

Rehearsals are designed to accommodate parenting duties. For instance, they may be scheduled from 4 to 10 in the evening, Ms. Rustin said. “That way, we can get a baby sitter for a couple of hours before our spouses come home from work” to watch the children, she said.

Three of the four actors who play more than 100 roles in the 80-minute show, which is directed by Jeremy Dobrish of Maplewood, are members of Midtown Direct Rep, the theater company formed at Sopac last year. The local actors are David Josefsberg and Bradley Dean, both of South Orange; and Joanna Young of Maplewood. Courtney Balan, a fourth cast member, lives in Manhattan.

Except for Ms. Balan, the performers are also parents, and so they are acting out situations they may encounter at home, Ms. Rustin said: going to soccer practice or attending parent-teacher conferences. “They’re really tapped into this culture and atmosphere,” she said, “especially the early years. I don’t think anyone has a child over 9.”

A similar sense of familiarity may settle over audiences during numbers like “A Prayer for Ellie,” which, Ms. Rustin said, is “basically a mother’s wish for her daughter on her first day of kindergarten, and a really poignant moment.” Parents are also likely to sympathize with “Morning Mambo,” about the daily race to fill lunch bags and to organize backpacks before the bus comes.

Ms. Rustin, an actress who regularly performs at the Upright Citizens Brigade Theater in Manhattan in “Gravid Water,” has ambitions that the performance at Sopac could be “just the beginning” for “Rated P.” It is the first show she has written, as well as Midtown Direct Rep’s first full production of original material.

“We have a lot of commercial producers coming,” Ms. Rustin said. “Our dream is it will get picked up Off Broadway.”

*“Rated P” is at the South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 Sopac Way, South Orange, May 5 to 8. Tickets: \$35 or \$45. [sopacnow.org](http://sopacnow.org) or (973) 313-2787.*



Photo: Jeff Larkin

NEW MUSICAL David Josefsberg and Joanna Young in “Rated P,” being performed in South Orange